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New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda items 8 and 9 *(continued)*

Review and appraisal of progress made in the implementation of the twelve critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action

Further actions and initiatives for overcoming obstacles to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action

The President: The Assembly will first hear a statement by His Excellency The Right Honourable Lieutenant-General Christon Tembo, Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia.

Lieutenant-General Tembo (Zambia): Allow me to express my Government's appreciation that a nation of our subregional grouping, the Southern African Development Community (SADC), through you, Mr. President, is presiding over this important special session of the General Assembly. We wish to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on the efficient and able manner in which you are guiding the business of this session.

Zambia has, since the Fourth World Conference on Women, made great strides in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action and has made significant progress in accomplishing specific commitments. We began our national implementation process by translating the Beijing Platform for Action into a national plan for the advancement of women. The strategic plan, which covers the period 1996 to 2001, identifies five priority areas: first, the persistent and growing burden of poverty on women and their unequal access to resources and lack of participation in economic structures and policies; secondly, inequality in access to opportunities in education, skills development and training; thirdly, women's unequal access to health and related services; fourthly, inequality between women and men in the sharing of power and decision-making; and fifthly, the rights of the girl child.

In addition, there are six underlying and cross-cutting issues identified as important in addressing the critical areas of concern. The cross-cutting issues are as follows: first, the critical role of the media at all levels; secondly, the need for gender-disaggregated data; thirdly, the establishment of effective institutional mechanisms; fourthly, promoting the human rights of women; fifthly, considering the implications of cultural and traditional Westernization in all areas; and sixthly, the rural, peri-urban and urban trichotomy of the Zambian population.

I am pleased to inform this special session that the Zambian Government and other stakeholders have endeavoured to implement the national plan with considerable results. The details of the measures undertaken, achievements made and obstacles encountered are reflected in a national mid-term review report, which has been widely circulated among United Nations agencies, Member States and others.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the interpretation of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

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The Zambian Cabinet adopted the first national gender policy on the 6 March 2000. This is a landmark document that prescribes policy measures that cut across sectors, institutional structures and issues and aim at enhancing gender responsive development. We are convinced that the policy will accelerate the implementation of the Platform for Action.

Given that political will and enthusiasm exist at all levels in Zambia, we consider the implementation of the Platform for Action as an integral part of our national development process. We therefore continue to make every effort to mainstream gender in all our policies and programmes.

In the process of implementing the Platform for Action, we have identified a number of obstacles and challenges which have affected the implementation process. The issues we have identified are certainly not new; they are, in fact, referred to in the Beijing Platform for Action. However, they have far-reaching implications for Government's capacity to implement the Platform for Action.

Key obstacles that have hampered our implementation include, first, household poverty; secondly, huge national debt; and thirdly, the HIV/AIDS pandemic. These three major obstacles, among others, pose a serious threat to the Platform for Action. We require strong and concerted national and international efforts in order to surmount them.

Household poverty is an extremely serious problem in Zambia. Currently, approximately 70 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line, the majority being women. Women and men experience poverty in different ways. The feminization of poverty is less a question of whether more women than men are poor than the severity of poverty, and of the greater hardships women face in lifting themselves and their children out of the poverty trap. The wide range of biases in society and the unequal opportunities in education, employment and access to and control over productive resources, such as land, means that women have fewer opportunities.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on women and children has emerged as a very serious one. A combination of physiological and socio-economic factors makes women more vulnerable to HIV infection than men. Poverty and HIV/AIDS are therefore closely linked. Poverty contributes to the spread of HIV and accentuates its impact. Poverty creates situations of vulnerability to infection, especially among women. The effect of HIV/AIDS on economic capacity is particularly significant. Associated with AIDS-related deaths are huge medical expenses and loss of human capital. Estimates state that without foreign capital inflows into Zambia, costs of medical treatment, attrition and other costs associated with AIDS would result in a fall in gross domestic product of about 9 per cent below normal projected levels. Without an unprecedented infusion of foreign aid, our national income would therefore be reduced significantly.

Zambia is in the category of highly indebted poor countries. In this regard, the debt burden is a major contributor to the persistence of its underdevelopment. Zambia's debt-servicing obligations constitute the single largest item of expenditure in the public budget. It far outstrips expenditure on health, education or any other sector.

Debt servicing has a significant impact on public budgets, and thus has severely shrunk resources available for development and has greatly reduced the prospects for growth. Inequalities are created and increased by debt not only through income, but also in respect of gender.

Evidently, Zambia has a legitimate reason to seek significant debt relief, if not outright debt cancellation. It has religiously continued to implement structural and other reforms. It remains committed to debt servicing, albeit to the detriment of our priorities in the social sectors, particularly in regard to poverty alleviation. Debt servicing assumes availability of resources for development through donor assistance. Debt servicing has in the main, however, deprived the country of resources that would have been channelled towards development activities. The reality of the situation is that the outflow through debt servicing far exceeds inflows through external aid. There is therefore a need for foreign debt-relief initiatives to go beyond the existing framework in order to increase the financial flows of resources to highly indebted developing countries.

There are other challenges that will require strong national and international collaboration and partnership. Violence against women and children, particularly girls, is a menace to human development. Another challenge is the impact of the socio-economic globalization process on our economy. There is a direct relationship between poor performance of the

economies of developing countries and the global economic system, which is presently biased in favour of developed countries. Unless the global economic system promotes growth in least developed countries, important development programmes, such as the Beijing Platform for Action, can realize only minimal results.

We wish to express sincere appreciation to the United Nations for conducting meetings to follow up the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action at national levels.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming my Government's commitment to implementing the Beijing Platform for Action. This is a responsibility we must assume for gender equality.

The President: I thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Zambia for his statement.

I now call on His Excellency Mr. Hasan Gemici, Minister of State of Turkey responsible for women's affairs, family and social services.

Mr. Gemici (Turkey) (*spoke in Turkish; English text furnished by the delegation*): Turkey fully supports the statement of the European Union delivered by the Portuguese Presidency. I shall take this opportunity to express our national views regarding the advancement and empowerment of women in Turkey.

Let me first express our appreciation for the invaluable contribution of the United Nations system, and of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, towards the advancement and empowerment of women. The United Nations has been highly instrumental in the formulation of policies responding to conceptual changes in the field of gender equality. The Fourth World Conference on Women was a breakthrough in the recognition of the concepts of gender and of women's human rights. My delegation believes that the full achievement of the human rights of women and girl children is not only a legal, but also an ethical responsibility. It must be our common objective to further strengthen international cooperation in this regard.

The founding of the Republic of Turkey and the reforms that followed were revolutionary in the cause of women's rights. Women in Turkey embraced their true identity with the Republic and gained suffrage rights before women in many other countries. In 1934 there were as few as 28 countries in the world where women had the right to elect and to be elected. Turkey was one of them. The civil code enacted in 1926 contained significantly advanced provisions in the field of gender equality. Today, building upon that legacy, we relentlessly pursue our goals: to enhance the status of women, to ensure gender equality and to promote the participation of women at all levels of social life. We have made some important achievements in this regard. But we know that the current situation calls for much improvement.

At Beijing, five years ago, Turkey made significant commitments. We committed ourselves to withdraw the reservations we had placed on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We promised to extend compulsory basic education from five to eight years. We announced our intention to reduce infant and maternal mortality rates by at least half by the year 2000 and to eradicate illiteracy among women. It is my great pleasure to state before the Assembly today that we have accomplished most of those commitments.

Compulsory basic education was increased from five to eight years in 1997. With this, the enrolment rate of girl children increased by 67 per cent. Although we have not been able fully to realize our commitments on the reduction of infant and maternal mortality rates and on the eradication of illiteracy among women, considerable improvements have taken place. We have enacted legislation on family protection. Under the new legislation, any family member subject to domestic violence can file for a protection order. As the Turkish Parliament passed this legislation in response to years of active advocacy and lobbying by the women's movement, it also acknowledged domestic violence as a major violation of women's human rights and confirmed the State's responsibility to protect women from such violations occurring in the private sphere.

As a part of this reform process, since the Beijing Conference, a new draft civil code, prepared with a gender perspective and incorporating the contributions of non-governmental women's organizations, is now before the Turkish parliament. In line with the Beijing Platform for Action, a standing committee on gender equality was established at the parliamentary level with a view to ensuring gender mainstreaming in all policies and legislative work.

One of the concrete gains since the Beijing Conference has been the flourishing of dynamic civil

society organizations in the field of women's human rights. As the State minister responsible for women's affairs, I would like to emphasize the substantial role of women's organizations in our work. In this connection I am particularly pleased that my delegation includes women members of Parliament from various political parties, as well as representatives of non-governmental women's organizations.

The advancement and empowerment of women is a dynamic process. That process rests not only on legislative reforms, but also on integrated measures in the fields of education, health and economic policies. Turkey is in the process of harmonizing its legal and administrative structure with the European Union *acquis communautaire*. The elimination of the obstacles hindering that process and ensuring the full enjoyment of rights provided by law is a vital part of the harmonization process.

We are gathered here today as the international community to identify where we stand in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We have undoubtedly been faced with common as well as country-specific problems in the past five years. Our experiences will shed light on our future actions. The draft political declaration and the draft outcome document that we hope will be adopted at the end of this special session will guide us. My country is determined to continue contributing to all international endeavours in the field of women's rights with full dedication.

At the national level, we plan to place further emphasis on the following issues, while being fully aware of the challenges we face. As a matter of priority, we are committed to allocating sufficient resources to gender equality issues. In close collaboration with all political parties and non-governmental women's organizations, we are trying to generate strong political will to that end. Ensuring the full and equal representation and participation of women at all levels of decision-making is also one of our priority concerns. We attach great importance to the institution-building process as a basis for achieving all these targets.

While the world community has witnessed dramatic improvements in the advancement of women and in gender equality, challenges still lie ahead. In various parts of the world, women and girl children are still confronted with inequality and injustice. It is our common duty and responsibility to ensure an enabling environment for all women to fully enjoy their rights.

This is a momentous gathering which will provide solid ground for cooperation and collaboration among Governments, civil society, international organizations and all other relevant actors with a view to realizing our ultimate goals of gender equality, development and peace.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Vilma Espín Buillois, member of the Council of State of Cuba and President of the Cuban Women's Federation.

Ms. Espín Buillois (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): During the five years since the Fourth World Conference on Women there have been, in a number of regions and countries, major advances in the implementation of certain aspects of the Beijing Platform for Action. It is true, however, that in many places women claim that this document, which is so vital for their progress, has been languishing in hidden archives.

The growing social activism of the masses of women and the pressure and demands upon Governments by many women's organizations with regard to the process of following up on Beijing have resulted in some progress in the enactment of laws recognizing women's political rights and incorporating the principle of equality in family law; indeed, in criminal law many countries have defined all the diverse forms of violence against women as crimes.

Some Governments have also created mechanisms — ministries, offices or commissions — with the specific objective of promoting progress for women. The most relevant aspect is the growing awareness on the part of women and the public in general of the rapid increase and expansion in existing and emerging social ills and of the lack of solutions to the most pressing problems that were identified and accorded priority in Beijing. The direct relationship between the worsening economic and social situation of women in the past five years and the general situation of a world dominated by the neo-liberal ideology, principles and rules of globalization, with its devastating impact, has become evident.

The world is entering the twenty-first century with 800 million human beings dying of hunger, while the 200 richest people in the world have amassed an

astronomical fortune amounting to $1 trillion. In 1999, the assets of the world's three richest people were greater than the combined gross national product of the 49 least developed countries.

The reality of today's world is deeply painful. More than half of the world's inhabitants are poor or destitute; 1 billion are illiterate; 250 million children work on a regular basis; 130 million people have no access whatsoever to education; and 100 million children live in the street. It has been estimated that over 11 million children under the age of five die every year from malnutrition, poverty or preventable or curable diseases.

The period under consideration is marked by a widening of the economic and technological gap between the countries of the South and the North, enormous differences between rich and poor within countries, the irrational and irreversible destruction of nature and its non-renewable resources, wastefulness and genocidal and economic wars.

In the past five years, women have seen themselves excluded from opportunities to gain access to dignified work, suitable technical and professional training, health care and the safeguards of social security. Privatization, adjustment policies, financial crises and the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund have increased the feminization of poverty and unemployment, job insecurity and the use of women as a cheap source of labour.

These are the most important issues that concern women today throughout the world, and they are often aggravated by the indifference and ineffectiveness of States weakened by the concept of neo-liberalism itself and by a lack of political will, resources and development possibilities. Without public policies in favour of the equitable participation of women in sustainable development, there can be no social progress.

In our country, the Beijing commitments were carried out in an environment, spirit and circumstances that were favourable to the achievement of significant results leading to the greater participation of women in the economic, social and political life of the country, so that gender equality could continue to develop and to advance.

The Republic of Cuba's national action plan for follow-up of the Beijing Conference, set up by the Council of State, is the expression our Government's political will and a recognition of Cuban women's human rights. I am very pleased to inform the Assembly that the programme has been successful and continues to be implemented with a full sense of responsibility and necessity by each and every one of the institutions involved.

Over the past five years, a modest but sustained recovery has been under way in the national economy, one in which women have played an essential role as workers, technicians, scientists, leaders and voluntary contributors to help their communities' development — protagonists of the enormous effort made in an indestructible union of women and men by all of the Cuban people.

The criminal measures being taken to escalate the economic war that the United States of America — the most powerful country in the world — declared on us almost four decades ago, have been unable to crush the will and determination of Cuban women and men. They have not been able to destroy our determination to preserve our social achievements and pursue our path towards development with social justice and equality. They have failed to prevent us from continuing to shape our dreams. In Cuba, truth and justice are realities. We hope that soon, in this country, justice will prevail and that Elián will return free and happy to Cuba, to his home, and the welcoming embrace of his grandparents, with his father, his father's wife and his little brother. We are sincerely grateful for the warm and steadfast support of the North American people in this struggle.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, in the framework of discussions held within the United Nations and other international forums, we often heard experts and representatives from both sides give assurances that all the resources devoted to arms production, technological development and research for war would be devoted to the elimination of hunger and poverty and to the creation of schools, hospitals and medical services to ensure the physical and intellectual development of all the people of the world and to conduct the necessary research to save humankind from dangerous diseases. These statements inspired great hopes among the peoples of the world, among all the inhabitants of the earth and among women, who have steadfastly fought with dignity to make their rights a reality, following the agreements reached at the 1975 meeting in Mexico.

In 1979 the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was immediately signed by Cuba and many other countries. It is shameful that, to date, certain States have not yet ratified it and that others have not even signed it.

It was believed that the past 10 years would be the decade of the advancement of women throughout the world — the decade in which they would be able fully to enjoy their human rights. It was to be the decade of children's rights, of human rights and the globalization of justice, solidarity and peace. It was believed that, at the threshold of a new millennium and a new century, new possibilities would be opened up for progress for all and for the exchange of and full participation in scientific and technological advances for the benefit of humanity.

However, that has not been the case. The final decade of the millennium has been characterized by the rapid rise of poverty, extreme violence, the consequences of the unbounded and insane greed of the huge economic Powers, the merchants of war and State terrorism, which today goes unpunished as the result of the unipolar nature of the world.

Bombing cities, with its huge cost in human life and injury; refusing to allow the sale of food or medicine; and the murder of thousands of children in their shelters with special penetrating missiles developed in research centres, conceived and designed for these brutal deeds: these and other abominable and monstrous actions are the result of that colossal selfishness.

Indiscriminate arms sales in conflict zones have created wars which that taken countless lives and brought about destruction and the displacement of children, women, the elderly and entire populations that emigrate, settling in precarious conditions and creating new problems.

The army of the poor multiplies, not to mention the traffickers, the kidnappers, the sellers of women and children destined for prostitution, slavery or the sale of their organs. How much cruelty, how much ignominy, what degree of degradation and lack of human conscience can be reached? All of these, the consequences of selfishness, of poverty, of violence, must come to an end. We must struggle for development. This entire order of things must be put to an end.

Undoubtedly, the neo-liberal model has failed. But still the inhabitants of this planet suffer and will continue to suffer the serious consequences of its profound and catastrophic crises. But mothers will not let their children starve to death. They will fight like lions to save them. A new economic and social order that would eliminate all types of discrimination and bring progress and welfare for all, the broadest respect for sovereignty, independence and the self-determination of peoples, and the full realization of human rights for all is essential and urgently needed. The aspiration to obtain equality, development and peace remains a fundamental goal for women.

Immersed in these supreme efforts is the women's movement, which is tireless, vibrant, present, growing and active in all continents. It is diverse and pluralistic, it is struggling vigorously and in awareness of the need to move towards another type of globalization, one of solidarity, one that is just and rational and includes all, women and men, in the enjoyment of a better life, a full life of dignity.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Ha Thi Khiet, Chairperson of the Committee for the Advancement of Women of Viet Nam.

Mrs. Ha Thi Khiet (Viet Nam) (*spoke in Vietnamese; English text furnished by the delegation*): On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to convey the warmest greetings to you, Mr. President, and the entire distinguished Assembly. We highly appreciate the efforts of the various Governments, United Nations agencies and, especially, the Commission on the Status of Women in the preparations for this first special session of the General Assembly on women. I hope and believe that our session will be a great success.

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam considers that women's emancipation is one of the major objectives of the Vietnamese revolution and that it exerts a direct and long-term impact on national development. In history, Vietnamese women have made glorious contributions, which are acknowledged by the entire nation, to the cause of national construction and defence; and at present, Vietnamese women possess huge potential and constitute an important impetus for the process of renewal. Proceeding from the conviction that the advancement of women brings about benefits for both women and men, family and society, the

Vietnamese Government's policy is to make adequate investment and provide diverse support to improve women's status and enhance their participation in all fields of life.

It can now be affirmed that the Beijing Conference in 1995 has contributed to the proud changes in Viet Nam. For the first time, our Government has approved and directed the implementation of the overall Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women, which fully reflects the spirit of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Our National Committee for the Advancement of Women has consolidated its organizational structures and extended its network to 50 ministries, other central Government agencies and all provinces and cities throughout the country. Public awareness on gender equality has been raised in general, creating a momentum for gradually integrating gender into policy-making and implementing processes in all ministries and at all other administrative levels.

As a result, over the past five years since Beijing, Viet Nam has recorded important achievements: the percentage of poor households went down from 30 per cent to 13 per cent in 1999; the literacy rate among women went up from 82 per cent to 88 per cent; the population growth rate was reduced to 1.558 per cent; and, as of last year, the average life expectancy of women was 69.9 years. What is particularly interesting is the fact that the number of women in leadership and elected bodies has increased throughout the power hierarchy. Women are represented from the top leadership of the State to the grass-roots levels of village and commune.

It is also gratifying to note that activities for the advancement of women in Viet Nam have been increasingly rich in content, diverse in form and more and more effective; those activities have involved the whole society. The Viet Nam Women's Union, as a mass organization broadly representing the rights and interests of women of all strata of society, has been playing a leading role in the network operating for the advancement of women. On the basis of these achievements, we wish to share with the Assembly our experience regarding integration of the State's sound policy and the women's dynamic movement and regarding the relationship between the catalytic role of the national machinery and the responsibilities of the authorities at all levels in the joint efforts for gender equality.

We agree with the fundamental positions contained in the two main draft documents of this session, namely the draft political declaration and the draft document on further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action. Though positive gains have been made in the pursuance of the Beijing Platform's concrete objectives, they still fall short of our expectations. We hold that the relations of partnership should be further enhanced in the international community, including those in the United Nations system — among intergovernmental mechanisms, Governments and non-governmental organizations, and between women and men the world over — to deal with the obstacles and challenges to the full implementation of the Beijing Platform. Appropriate solutions to the negative aspects of the vigorously unfolding globalization process must also be found to ensure that women and men in developing countries can have the opportunity to participate in and to benefit from this process as those in developed countries do.

Gender equality and the advancement of women must become a cross-cutting theme in the endeavour for peace, stability and cooperation for development, which is a trend facing all nations and States of the world. For that reason, we welcome the fact that this special session is to set a time-frame for the initiatives and follow-up actions aimed at effectively implementing the Beijing Platform. The Vietnamese delegation would like to propose that the Fifth World Conference on Women be convened in 2005, in keeping with the established tradition, to review the 20 years of implementation of the Nairobi Strategies and the 10 years of implementation of the Beijing Platform, and to map out a global strategy on gender equality and the advancement of women for the following years of the twenty-first century.

Once again, the Vietnamese Government pledges to do its utmost, in the context of the specific conditions of Viet Nam, to successfully implement the Beijing Platform.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Hedy Fry, Secretary of State for the Status of Women of Canada.

Mrs. Fry (Canada): I am honoured to be here representing Canada.

In 1995 the United Nations *Human Development Report* called the long walk towards gender equality

the most important movement of the twentieth century. That same year, the Beijing Platform for Action was accepted, and it became the turning point that moved the world beyond the rhetoric to the substantive. As we enter the twenty-first century, it remains the blueprint for empowering women and for achieving universal gender equality.

(*spoke in French*)

With that blueprint in hand, Canada is here today with the world's nations to chart the course for a new century and to build on the tenuous gains women have made in the twentieth century.

(*spoke in English*)

We believe that to allow those hard-won gains to be eroded would be an injustice to the women of the world and would mark a backward step in our shared goals of economic and social development, peace and human security.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada remains resolute in its commitment to the equality of men and women throughout the world. We have confirmed this commitment by action at the national and international levels.

(*spoke in English*)

Within the United Nations and other forums, such as the Commonwealth, la Francophonie, the Organization of American States and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, Canada has shared its data, research, experiences and best practices. We have learned from other countries creative ways of promoting women's rights and of ensuring that these rights are realized, not only *de jure* but de facto.

This year in Canada, we mark the thirtieth anniversary of the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which was the first formal acknowledgement of women's rights in Canada. As a result, equal rights for women became enshrined within the Canadian Constitution, becoming the cornerstone for legislative and legal advancements. Over the past 30 years, Canada has made slow but steady progress in the realization of gender equality domestically, seeking to implement our own federal plan for gender equality.

We have strengthened the machinery of government dedicated to this task, enacted new legislation and developed policies and programmes that have improved the lives of women. We continue to seek to mainstream gender into all aspects of government and its institutions, using gender-based analysis. Gender-based analysis has demonstrated its importance to the economic status of women in areas such as entrepreneurship, tax reform, pay equity and trade; and in areas of social policy such as pension benefits, assistance to low- and middle-income families, Centres of Excellence for Women's Health and extended parental leave benefits. We have strengthened Criminal Code provisions to address violence and will soon launch gender and peace-building training initiatives.

(*spoke in French*)

In spite of this progress, many societal and systemic barriers remain. Gender analysis has shown that, in a multicultural country such as ours, women's inequality is further compounded by such factors as diversity, race, ethnicity, immigrant and indigenous status, sexual orientation, disability and age.

(*spoke in English*)

Therefore, in Canada, recognition of diversity is extremely important.

Poverty remains a reality for many Canadian women, especially single parents and aboriginal, immigrant and disabled women. This underscores the reality that poverty is the single greatest barrier to access and participation, not only for women, but also for their children.

(*spoke in French*)

Violence against women in the home and in the community continues to be an impediment to the development of safe and secure communities.

(*spoke in English*)

In Canada, we do not believe that substantive progress towards equality for women can be achieved unless we work with non-governmental organizations, which are essential to the development of effective and practical public policy and whose advocacy continues to keep our Governments on track and focused on equality for women, who make up close to 52 per cent of our population.

Internationally, Canada is concerned and active in the development of protocols against human smuggling, whose primary targets, we know, are

women and children. We consider trafficking in humans to be a twenty-first century form of slavery and an absolute denial of human rights.

Our commitment to human rights is further evidenced in Canada's insistence on the establishment of an International Criminal Court. We consider this to be the most gender-sensitive piece of international humanitarian law and we are pleased with the recent adoption of the protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography, and children in armed conflict.

(*spoke in French*)

Canada is determined to continue to work to reduce the systemic barriers to women's equality, to increase awareness and appreciation of the benefits of human diversity, to research and advance the linkages between economic and social policy and to point out their interdependence.

(*spoke in English*)

The Beijing Platform for Action remains relevant and critically important to the achievement of these goals. It sets a benchmark upon which we must build, rather than deconstruct. When we deny women the right to justice and the opportunity to participate equally in all aspects of the economic, social, political and cultural life of their countries, we retard the social and economic development of these countries. We retard their competitiveness in the global arena and condemn their peoples to permanent and second-class status on the world stage. When we empower women, we empower their children and generations to come. When we protect women, we protect not only our daughters, sisters, wives and mothers, but also our sons and brothers.

We are convinced that the future economic and social development of Member States — and, indeed, of the world — will not progress unless women, who make up over 55 per cent of the world's human resources, have an opportunity to contribute. We also believe that the goals of peace and human security will remain forever elusive unless women are protected, respected and given a seat at the decision-making table.

We cannot, my friends, go backward. The Beijing Platform for Action is a beginning, not an end. The lives of women and children sit in the balance and their future lies in our hands.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Francesca Michelotti, Minister for Internal Affairs and Justice of San Marino.

Ms. Michelotti (San Marino): It is with great emotion that I convey to this special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", the greetings of the delegation of the Republic of San Marino.

The bold and far-reaching women's revolution continues irreversibly. Those describing this process as the greatest revolution or as the only revolution of our times are not referring exclusively to the fact that the "other half of the sky" is involved but, most significantly, to the comprehensive view of the world it fosters and the radical improvements it advocates.

Today, gathered in the United Nations building, we are finally exercising our right to express our opinions, which is a remarkable success, as we would have never expected that our personal, slow and tough struggle, along with that of many others, would make us the protagonists of our own destiny. Yet, for all the differences in the historical, social, cultural and economic backgrounds of our respective nations, this is the important achievement we all share.

This assembly provides an enriching opportunity for all women to go beyond their daily experiences and gain a wider perspective. Today, more than in the years of feminism in Europe and the Western world, of women's liberation, of their struggle for survival in Africa or the Americas and of their advancement in Asia and the Middle East, we are aware that any single identity cannot be disregarded when sharing views and experiences and that all cultural contributions are equally valuable. At the same time, we must avoid any oppressive or levelling attempt based on vague standards or schemes to be taken for granted.

This is the real significance of today's meeting. This is the challenge that all women can issue for a third millennium rich in expectations and potential attainments. Therefore, even the smallest nation in the world community can contribute to this global and many-sided debate with its own experiences. Also, in San Marino, women have been silent or silenced for a long time and very few have managed to express their thoughts or to have their voice heard. In our advanced societies, too often do women boast leadership in the world political, social and economic structure,

disregarding, however, that gender inequalities still deny women full access to those key positions where their decisions and choices would enhance their well-being and foster development.

A fundamental rethinking of all human rights and freedoms, as well as a redefinition of present social rules and organization, are a *sine qua non* condition for overhauling an inadequate or hostile male-dominated society, which necessarily depends on women's active participation if better prospects are to be attained.

Significant progress has been made over the last few decades thanks to the valuable cooperation offered by women. In every economic and social sector, and in a gender mainstreaming perspective, women have undertaken not only to eradicate marginalization, discrimination and exploitation, but also to bridge the wide gap between the North and the South.

Women's issues have thus offered new incentives — and will increasingly do so in the future — to think of a new economic world order, review the allocation of resources and reaffirm the safeguarding and protection of life on the planet.

The strength shown today by the women's movement worldwide is no longer confined to the mere search for a "development niche", but is rather the expression of an ongoing process that is irrevocably dismantling preordained schemes in the context of global development, coexistence between ethnic groups and cultures, and peace-building.

From family to school, from education to employment, from politics to personal well-being, the women's movement has imposed a new way of conceiving history, human relations and gender roles. It has focused greater attention on the relationships between environment and culture, natural differences and social discrimination, participation in public life and gender, and on reiterating and reasserting the right to one's own identity in the face of any simplistic or ambiguous attempt to level out diversities.

Bearing in mind that the experiences of each and every one of us highlight the paramount importance of the issues we are discussing, I wish to submit, on behalf of my delegation, some data on the status of women in San Marino. I am confident that this information will enrich our dialogue and provide food for thought.

As has been the case in all European countries, the path towards gender equality has been relatively easy for San Marino women too. Thanks to favourable economic conditions, we have achieved, more rapidly than elsewhere, important participation levels that are still unimaginable for most women in the world. Today a significant number of San Marino women hold intermediate and high-ranking positions in both the public and private sectors.

The entire population has access to social security and social support, and women can benefit from all necessary services. Wage equality between male and female workers is a consolidated achievement, as is trade union equality. The educational level is extremely high and diversified, and a wide range of opportunities are offered.

The process of achieving legal equality, however, unlike in other European countries, has been long and difficult and has not yet been completed successfully despite the country's widespread affluence. San Marino still lags behind in the area of legal equality, as is evidenced on the one hand by the low rate of female representation in Parliament and in politics, and on the other hand by the inadequate recognition of the right of women to transmit their nationality — a well-established achievement in all economically advanced countries.

Today we are still demanding to be effectively recognized "citizens as of right". In fact, this claim still encounters cultural and institutional opposition, which is by now anachronistic.

It is fundamental for San Marino women that citizenship be considered as an inherent right and not a strategic concession. This would imply the full acknowledgement of women's human and social contribution to the development of the country, full respect for its ancient democratic values and the preservation of its traditions, which could be disrupted as a consequence of globalization.

We will continue our battle with great determination, prompted by the conviction that our voice will be heard. At the same time, we are ready to pool our efforts and contribute, in every possible way, to women's liberation throughout the world.

The Republic of San Marino fully supports the worldwide women's movement, and in all international forums where it is present, it will back all initiatives

advocating and safeguarding women's rights, in the hope that everlasting peace and justice can thrive also in those countries where they are still hindered by violence.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Olga Dagel, Minister for Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus.

Mrs. Dagel (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): It is a great honour for me today to address the representatives of the international community from this lofty rostrum on the occasion of this special session of the General Assembly dedicated entirely to gender issues. The delegation of the Republic of Belarus expresses special gratitude to the United Nations for its ongoing attention to women's issues at the international level.

Owing to the perseverance of this Organization, gender equality is recognized today as one of the main goals of modern social development.

For the Republic of Belarus, the Beijing Platform for Action has become a basic instrument for the elaboration of a national strategy on the advancement of women. Having assessed its implementation, we can state that we have achieved considerable progress in this domain.

Thanks to the assistance and support of the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenka, and of the Government of our country, the National Plan of Action and the National Programme "Women of the Republic of Belarus" have been adopted and are being gradually implemented.

The establishment of the National Mechanism for the Advancement of Women has been practically completed. Our country's Government has approved the regulations for the National Council on Gender Policy.

Work to improve national legislation aimed at advancing the status of women and making it consistent with international standards is under way. This process is complemented by efforts to raise women's awareness on legal issues.

In addition to the international instruments already signed, our country's national process concerning the signing of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women has been undertaken. Women's involvement in public, political and managerial activities is one of the main approaches for their attainment of equality. We are glad to note that in Belarus, women's participation in the decision-making process has been gradually expanding.

Gender statistics are being improved, and comparative analysis of women's and men's status is much easier to perform on a wider scale. The first statistical publication, *Women and Men in the Republic of Belarus*, has appeared. Gender research has become more widespread in Belarus. Its results are reflected in the national report entitled "Belarusian women as seen through an era", which was published under the auspices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project "Women in development".

Problems relating to the status of women are receiving more attention in the mass media. The gender education system has emerged. Gender issues have been introduced into the curricula of four Belarusian universities. These achievements can be fully shared with representatives of UNDP, the United Nations Development Fund for Women and the United Nations Children's Fund in our country.

Considerable changes are taking place in Belarusian society. Alongside a reappraisal of spiritual values, a new vision of women's place and role in society has emerged. Being aware that it is more difficult to overcome a period of crisis alone, women have begun to unite. As a result, a new phenomenon has appeared in the public life of our country: women's non-governmental organizations that cooperate quite actively with the Government on a regular basis. They participated actively in the discussion of the national report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in Belarus at the conference organized within the framework of preparation for this special session. In our view, the report turned out to be comprehensive and well balanced. We are glad that we have been able to provide it to delegations today. We hope that our report will be Belarus's contribution to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing decisions.

Despite the measures taken, the situation of women in Belarus is still quite difficult. The obstacles impeding our progress include inadequate financial resources, aggravated by the need to allocate over 10 per cent of the State budget to eliminating the consequences of Chernobyl; strongly persistent

stereotypes related to the social roles played by men and women in society; and men's inadequate involvement in activities ensuring gender equality.

Taking this into consideration, the Government has decided to develop, by the end of the year 2000, a new Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women for 2001-2005. In designing this plan, the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, stemming from consideration of the Belarus's third periodical report last January, will be taken fully into account.

In the coming century we want the world to be based on love and responsibility, not on power and violence, which devastate human nature and the soul. To achieve this, it is necessary for women and men to become equal and to be equally responsible partners in every sphere of life. We hope that this special session will define ways to achieve the goals of Beijing. Our commitment to these goals is unanimously reaffirmed.

The President: I call on Her Excellency The Honourable Katia Bellilo, Minister of Equal Opportunities of Italy.

Ms. Bellilo (Italy) (*spoke in Italian*; *English text furnished by the delegation*): The documents we are about to adopt clearly express the political will and commitment of the Governments of the world to the full and accelerated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. For the Italian Government this commitment comes at the end of a long road that reached a turning point in 1996. A centre-left Government was elected, and it established for the first time ever, the position of Minister for Equal Opportunities.

The national report that summarizes our work from these years is available to all present, so I will not dwell on it. Instead, I would like to talk about problems that go beyond our national dimension, regarding the connection between the Beijing policies and the global challenges facing every country and the United Nations as a whole.

The first is the challenge of poverty. As the numbers tell us, poverty has the face of a woman. This is why Italy's development cooperation activities in Africa, the Balkans, Central America and elsewhere have focused on key policies to fight the social exclusion of women and empower them as agents of political change and economic development. This is true both in bilateral initiatives and in our enhanced support for international agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women.

The second is the challenge of economic globalization. For globalization to become a source of new opportunities rather than new inequalities, we must also globalize human rights, equality and equal opportunities for all women and men throughout the world. It is on this basis that Italy has chosen to give priority to reducing the debt of the poorest countries and on the gender-sensitive social policies that should accompany this step — for example, through participatory decentralized development cooperation.

Thirdly, with regard to the challenge of preventing conflicts, we must come to terms with the tragic experience of recent years: wars generated by ethnic and religious intolerance, and characterized by a systematic attack on the bodies and freedom of women. To prevent such conflicts, political and peacekeeping measures are not enough. We need a vision of the future that sees diversity as an asset and that treasures the ability, first and foremost of women, to build coexistence on the basis of the concrete, diversified needs of individuals and communities.

In Europe we face these challenges every day. Together we are struggling to emerge from the devastating experience of the Balkans through cooperation, democracy and human rights. Again we are faced with the same challenge, in Sierra Leone, or in the Horn of Africa, where Italy is playing a leading role in efforts to find a peaceful solution to the conflict. We cannot allow our perceptions of the African wars to be clouded by indifference, or worse, by racism. Nor can we forget that the victims, refugees fleeing from the Balkans and Africa, are for the most part women, and that women are the key actors, even in such extreme circumstances, ensuring care for their families and respect for human dignity.

On all these issues, there are close ties between the themes of today's special session and the themes of the upcoming Millennium Summit. This lends even greater urgency to our work today and to our future prospects. In that light, monitoring the will of Governments to implement their Beijing commitments is not a technical issue but a highly political one. Technical instruments are obviously needed, and so are international legal instruments. But above all, we need political instruments.

For several years now, Italy has been championing the reform and democratization of the United Nations. This reform need look no further than the experience of women for a wealth of ideas and proposals, starting with the ability of women to develop dialogue and partnerships in and with civil society. Without such partnerships, the United Nations of the new millennium will never get under way, nor will the global changes advocated by the United Nations conferences of the 1990s, which borrowed their legitimacy, energy and vision precisely from their dialogue with non-governmental organizations.

But today's movements are not always seeking dialogue. The Seattle march against the World Trade Organization and the Washington demonstrations against the International Monetary Fund were sometimes reactive rather than proactive. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore their voices. We must build new strategies that embrace the most forward-looking ideas that such protests have expressed. Likewise, we must seriously consider the proposals of the non-governmental organization forum and learn from the experience of women in the many movements which advocate all human rights for all.

Let me repeat that: all human rights for all women and all men. Social, cultural and economic rights, which in Europe mean first and foremost the right to work, in developing countries mean the right to people-centred sustainable development. As to civil and political rights, it is not enough to make these rights law if we do not tackle the democratic deficit represented by political, economic and social inequality between women and men. Last but not least are sexual and reproductive rights. We approved the substance of those rights in Cairo and in Beijing. Today we should no longer hesitate to call them by their proper name, and defend them against any and all violations, no matter who commits them.

As we did in Beijing and at the conferences of past decades, I hope we shall once again manage to find a consensus on these issues, with full respect for our political and cultural diversity. We have built a great heritage, a heritage that has given strength, authority and new political space to all of us, in government and in civil society. That is why decisions on whether to work towards a new world conference on women in future years or towards other common forums, on what those forums should be and on who should participate cannot simply be absorbed into a general debate on how to follow up the United Nations conferences of the 1990s.

Women are not one problem among many; they are half of humankind. In a globalized but paradoxically more fragmented and unequal world, women are the half that know how to find strength through dialogue and unity, through understanding diversity while upholding equality of rights. Women can overcome the boundaries that divide continents and cultures, North and South, institutional roles and grass-roots experience.

The United Nations of the year 2000 cannot do without that resource. Empowering women, through granting them decision-making powers and forums where their voices can be heard, is not a concession. It is an investment in our common future.

The President: I now give the floor to Her Excellency The Honourable Indranie Chandarpal, Minister of Human Services and Social Security of Guyana.

Ms. Chandarpal (Guyana): This special session is an opportunity not only for review and assessment but also to propose bold new actions and initiatives for the further advancement of women in this new century. The Beijing Platform for Action has now been widely recognized as an invaluable tool for the social, economic and political empowerment of women throughout their life cycle. Gender mainstreaming and equal partnerships between women and men in all areas of development have been established as global strategies for promoting gender equality.

However, many of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action remain unfulfilled, reflecting to a large extent the gap between articulation and implementation of women's rights. Women continue to constitute the majority of people living in poverty, with little or no access to education and health services. Each year, more than a half a million women die from pregnancy-related causes, while another 23 million develop life-threatening complications which could have been avoided. Women from developing countries are the worst affected, representing more than 99 per cent of those deaths.

This situation exists despite rapidly increasing global income and the recognized link between improved economic power for women and their increased level of equality. It has been well established

that women with greater independent control of economic resources, including access to education and health services, have greater control over their own fertility and more say about their other rights and freedoms.

Since the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Beijing Platform for Action has underpinned a number of local strategies and initiatives undertaken by the Government of Guyana. The translation of gender-oriented policy and legislation into de facto equality for women has often required the adoption of special measures whose impact could be felt directly and immediately. Such measures have included the introduction of a poverty alleviation programme with an emphasis on women, which has served to reduce women's greater vulnerability to the effects of economic crisis and hardship. The Government of Guyana is also committed to providing safe water, housing, sanitation, health, public safety, transportation and other basic services to support women in their multiple roles.

Similarly, training programmes have been specifically targeted at women to improve their job opportunities and their ability to compete in the job market. A leading example in this field is the work being carried out by the Women's Leadership Institute, which was launched by the Government in 1997. The Institute's programmes are aimed at imparting skills and information for life and at empowering women to participate as leaders in local government, community development, environmental issues and entrepreneurial development.

Legislative reforms on issues affecting women have moreover been promoted. In 1995, the medical termination of pregnancy act was enacted in Guyana with a view to decriminalizing abortions. The act provides not only the legal framework for clinically safer options for women desirous of terminating pregnancies but also serves as a means of safeguarding women and girls from unsafe abortions. Similarly, the adoption of the domestic violence act in 1996 was a definitive step by the Government of Guyana to eliminate domestic violence, which affects women from all socio-economic strata of society.

Ms. Yai (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

A national steering committee, consisting of 33 national organizations, has been formed to address the eradication of family violence. A legal aid centre has been established through a joint Government and non-governmental organization initiative to offset the financial burden of legal fees that women face in the resolution of their domestic and other legal battles. Shelters are now available to provide safety and counselling for abused women and children. An organization entitled "Men against Violence against Women" has also been launched. In addition, thousands of men have signed on to the Guyana Human Rights Association campaign to eradicate violence and to develop awareness, particularly within the male community, about the abuse of women.

Another important demarche to protect the rights of women was the 1996 National Policy Paper on Women. It identified a number of broad principles on which the Government's policy on women is based.

Through its ministries and agencies, the Government of Guyana has continued to develop policies and programmes to promote the equality of women in law in keeping with its undertakings as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We are working towards the transformation of cultural attitudes, customs and practices that discriminate against women. We consider the adoption in 1997 of the Prevention of Discrimination Act as a step in the right direction to prohibit discrimination against women, particularly on the grounds of pregnancy.

The five-year National Plan of Action on Women, Guyana's national development strategy, and reforms of the national constitution have all been drafted in keeping with the Government's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action. A gender-mainstreaming approach has been developed for Constitutional reforms, as well as for the development strategy, which is a multisectoral development plan for the nation. I am pleased to announce agreement by all political parties to undertake to ensure that at least one third of all their candidates are women.

The spirit of Beijing has been visible and has been a strong force for change in Guyana's society, as demonstrated by the enthusiastic response of both men and women to various programmes and activities for the advancement of women. We have witnessed meetings and gatherings transcending race, religion, sex and political barriers to protest violence against

women. This atmosphere has indeed rejuvenated and increased the number of women's organizations, with non-governmental organizations — estimated to be 65 in number and located throughout the country — giving spirited support to all issues of women's rights. Many of our successful women are acting as role models and mentors for women and girls nationwide.

In 1997, Guyana was pleased to host a post-Beijing conference for the Caribbean Community countries, which resulted in the Georgetown Consensus for the advancement of women.

Our own experience has taught us that women's advancement depends greatly on political will and commitment, the outlay of adequate resources and the involvement of women as equal partners in policies and decisions that affect their lives. Despite our best efforts, however, poverty alleviation continues to remain a formidable challenge. In these circumstances, we must reiterate the call for urgent international action to address the development challenges of developing countries. Much-needed resources for health, education, employment-generation and social protection are being constrained by high debt-servicing bills, inadequate markets for our exports, volatile terms of trade and trade barriers to our products, among other problems.

The outpouring of goodwill and support for programmes aimed at gender equality are but the culmination of the momentum that started in 1975, gathered strength in 1980 and 1985 and continued through to 1995. It may be appropriate to posit the view that we are all safely on a journey in which there will be no U-turns. We cannot allow the gains achieved since Beijing to be eroded. I call on all of us to recommit ourselves and provide the leadership to promote and protect the rights of women and girls worldwide. It is the hope of the delegation of Guyana that the outcome document we adopt at this special session will provide even greater impetus to global efforts towards gender equality, development and peace in this new century.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. John O'Donoghue, Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform of Ireland.

Mr. O'Donoghue (Ireland): I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Division for the Advancement of Women for all their work for this special session of the General Assembly.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action signalled a commitment on the part of Governments to international norms in gender equality, to the elimination of discrimination against women and to the removal of obstacles to equality for women. Ireland fully endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The actions agreed at Beijing are being assimilated into Irish Government policy in a manner appropriate to Irish conditions.

The five years since the Beijing Platform for Action have seen major changes in Ireland, in terms of both the legislative framework and Irish society generally. Many major ground-breaking pieces of rights-based legislation have been passed in Ireland in the last two years. These include the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000. The Employment Equality Act, 1998 came into operation on 18 October 1999. The Act prohibits discrimination in relation to employment on nine grounds: gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller community.

What is particularly significant about this legislation is the widening of the grounds from gender and marital status to include the other seven grounds mentioned. We are all aware that women often face double discrimination, both on the grounds of their gender and for other reasons, such as race or disability. This legislation should help to address this problem.

Perhaps even more ground-breaking is the Equal Status Act, 2000, which prohibits discrimination on similar grounds in the non-employment area. It was signed into law in April and will come into force later this year. It applies to any goods and services which are available to the public, whether payment is involved or not, irrespective of whether the service is provided by the public or private sector.

Human rights are an essential prerequisite for gender equality, and I am glad to be able to point to very significant developments in Ireland on this issue. The Human Rights Commission Act, 2000, which provides for the establishment of a human rights commission, was signed into law last month. Furthermore, legislation is being prepared to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into Irish law.

The unprecedented economic growth in Ireland in recent years has been the catalyst for major change in Irish society and has had a particular impact on the role of women. The participation of women in the labour force has risen from a relatively low level to over 47 per cent. We are committed to supporting those women who wish to gain access or return to the workforce or who wish to avail themselves of training or educational opportunities through policies such as gender mainstreaming and support for childcare provision.

We are also taking steps to ensure that the demands which our buoyant economy is making for increased numbers in the workforce does not result in any devaluing of the role of women who choose to work in the home. It was only in the 1970s in Ireland that women were given a statutory right to remain in paid employment after marriage. That choice was hard won. The choice of women to remain at home to care for their children or elders should not be lost. Towards this end, our social security and tax policies have been used to support care providers in their role through improvements in the care providers allowance scheme, the introduction of a special tax allowance for care providers and improved pension arrangements.

In 1998, 96 per cent of 16-year-old females and 77 per cent of 17-year-old females were in full-time education. The corresponding figures for males were 88 per cent and 73 per cent. Upper secondary graduation rates for women in Ireland exceed those for men by 14 percentage points, the greatest difference in all Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries. However, the Irish Government is aware that difficulties still exist in relation to female education. For example, girls are still under-represented in technical and engineering subjects in schools, and the entrance of females into engineering degree courses is still only 17 per cent on average, but at some institutions still as low as 2 per cent. Some disadvantaged women still have difficulty gaining access to education and training.

A review is being undertaken of the overall structures for the monitoring and implementation of present commitments in relation to gender equality. While much progress has been made, it is agreed that there is still some way to go to achieve full gender equality in Irish society. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform in Ireland has started work on the development of a National Action Plan for Gender Equality for 2000-2005. Consultation with non-governmental organizations will be an important part of the work of developing the Action Plan.

Ireland's overseas aid development programme, Ireland Aid, has long realized that women bear the brunt of financial and social inequity. As part of the preparation for and follow-up to Beijing, Ireland Aid undertook a major review of existing gender activities in its programme. This led to the adoption of formal Gender Guidelines in 1996. Ireland Aid's approach attempts to consider the impact on both women and men as an integral part of all projects, from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation.

The 1999 review of Ireland Aid carried out by the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD commented favourably on Ireland's efforts to mainstream gender into our bilateral aid programmes. In addition, Ireland, together with its European Union partners, continues to monitor European Union projects to ensure that they comprehensively address gender issues.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Ireland supports the Platform for Action and agrees that there should be no renegotiation of the text and actions agreed in 1995. We must build on the achievements of Beijing and adopt an outcome document that will move the agenda forward in practical ways and ensure that genuine equality becomes a fact of life for women and men throughout the world.

I wish the Assembly every success in the remaining days of this special session.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Ms. Zobaida Jalal, Minister for Women's Development, Social Welfare and Special Education of Pakistan.

Ms. Jalal (Pakistan): On behalf of my delegation, I wish to congratulate the President of the General Assembly at this very special session on his election. I also wish to thank Ms. Christine Kapalata, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, and her colleagues for their hard work during the preparatory process for this session.

The Fourth World Conference in Beijing provided a major impetus to international and national efforts aimed at the advancement and empowerment of women. This special session will reinforce and reinvigorate the process that we collectively initiated five years ago.

Over the past half century, the women's rights movement has made important strides. Today, there is universal recognition that the status and role of women in society is intrinsically linked to the economic progress and prosperity of nations. It is now accepted that no country can achieve and sustain prosperity if nearly half of its population remains neglected and excluded from the national development process. Despite these positive trends, we still have a long way to go for the realization of the objectives of the Beijing Conference.

We live in a world marked by diversity of cultures, races, beliefs and religions. This diversity, indeed, is our greatest strength. It is imperative that we respect each other's views, religious beliefs and value systems, and avoid the stereotyping of any religion. Misplaced notions of the superiority of one value system over others and attempts to impose the norms of one society on another defeat the very principle of freedom of choice and the spirit of cooperation and mutual respect. However, we also recognize that certain core values are universal and must be respected by all.

We in Pakistan believe that our religion establishes ideals and norms that are exemplary for a social vision to ensure dignity, security, equality and full participation of women in the economic and political mainstream of the national life. Islam proscribes discrimination against women and fully protects their fundamental human rights. It gives full recognition to the role of women in the economic and social progress of nations. Based on Islamic precepts, our Constitution guarantees the status and dignity of women and forbids discrimination on the basis of race, religion, caste or sex.

My Government believes in translating the rhetoric of women's rights into reality, and to this end it has undertaken a number of substantive initiatives. Thus, we have seven women ministers holding important portfolios ranging from health and education to law and justice; four of them are part of the Pakistan delegation to this session. At the institutional level, we have strengthened the Federal Ministry and provincial departments for women's development and established a permanent National Commission on the Status of Women to oversee, coordinate and accelerate national efforts for the empowerment of women and the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The Federal Ministry and provincial departments are being assisted by advisory boards comprising representatives of women's organizations on all policy and administrative issues. Other steps include the reform and revision of laws that discriminate against women, the reservation of 30 per cent of seats for women in national and provincial legislatures and 50 per cent representation in the grass-roots representative bodies and increasing the quota for women candidates in public sector employment. Measures have also been taken to initiate prosecution in cases of domestic violence, address sexual harassment in the workplace, generate awareness against early marriages, improve conditions for women prisoners and strengthen family courts to effectively remedy marital disputes.

The existence of violence against women in every society remains a painful reality of our times. We must reinforce our efforts to eliminate this evil. The incidence of violence against women and girls becomes even more acute in situations of armed conflicts. My heart goes out in sympathy and solidarity to women and girls who have suffered and, in some cases, continue to suffer the most egregious human rights violations and physical abuse in places like Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Jammu and Kashmir.

We therefore note with satisfaction that the Statute of the International Criminal Court has designated the physical abuse of women as a crime against humanity. The perpetrators of such heinous crimes should be awarded exemplary punishments. In Pakistan, we regard any form of discrimination or violence against women and girls as an unacceptable criminal offence. We are also conscious that, apart from being a human rights issue, it has enormous social and economic costs for society as a whole.

The Government of Pakistan has therefore taken a number of measures to eliminate all forms of violence against women. Recently, the Chief Executive of Pakistan declared so-called "honour killings" to be premeditated murder. This has been done to ensure maximum punishments for the perpetrators of such abhorrent crimes. I would also like to take this opportunity to urge our partners in other parts of the world where honour killings are depicted as crimes of passion to adopt similar rigorous legal measures.

Since the Beijing Conference, we have focused our attention on reviewing and consolidating policy

and strengthening institutional and administrative actions with a view to enhancing the capability of every woman and girl child in Pakistan to enable her active, visible participation in the political process and effective decision-making, from the household to the highest levels of national public affairs; making adequate provisions to expand, enhance and sustain the access of women and children to the best possible health care services, education and skill development, housing, social welfare and rehabilitation of the disabled through grass roots community-development programmes; evaluating and quantifying the role and contribution of women in production and services, measuring the disparities in access to productive resources and determining the incidence of feminization of poverty; and taking immediate steps to rectify imbalances in resource allocation to the social sector by undertaking investment in development and providing adequate social security safeguards to protect weaker segments of society, particularly women and girls, against the negative impact of globalization.

Universal literacy and quality education are key to the empowerment of women and girls. The objective of education for all has been one of the priority areas of our national plan of action as a follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Other priority areas have been health and access to productive resources. To achieve these objectives, we have taken major initiatives under our Social Action Programme, which focuses on the expansion of female literacy through conventional and non-conventional education, skill training, market absorption through entrepreneurial advice, the provision of micro-finance and the renewal of curriculum and teaching methodologies for creating greater gender sensitivity. The Social Action Programme pays special attention to reducing maternal mortality, to maternity care and to malnutrition through a life cycle approach to women's heath care and a closer integration of health and population welfare activities.

We are particularly concerned by the feminization of poverty. Therefore, in our poverty reduction programme, which has been strengthened by the diversion of 7 billion rupees from the defence budget despite prevailing tensions in the region, we have taken targeted actions to address this problem.

We regard the family as a source of social cohesion and stability. It plays an important role in reducing the incidence of poverty through traditional support systems and provides the crucial link between the individual and society, as well as the State. We therefore fully incorporate this important role of the family in our development planning.

Despite all these initiatives and efforts, like other developing countries we face formidable challenges in the realization of the goals of the Beijing Conference. Some of these are associated with the process of globalization, which has largely worked to the disadvantage of developing countries. Others pertain to resource constraints owing to declining commodity prices, lack of access to international markets and inequitable trading regimes. We believe that international cooperation and solidarity were never so vital as they are today in launching collective efforts to achieve sustained economic growth, sustainable development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Let us pledge at this historic moment to join hands to reinforce endeavours to realize the vision of a society in which every woman and man can live in equality, prosperity and peace in the new century.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Shahrizat Abdul Jalil, Deputy Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister of Malaysia.

Ms. Jalil (Malaysia): I would like to join other speakers in extending my congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia on his election as the President of the General Assembly at this twenty-third special session.

Malaysia regards the review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action through this special session of the General Assembly as a critical moment in the history of the intervention of the United Nations in promoting the advancement of women. In recognition of the seriousness of this occasion, Malaysia has, in its 27-member delegation, 15 elected women representatives from the state and federal legislatures, academicians, scholars, and professionals, as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations. Their presence here is a reflection of the strong commitment of the Malaysian Government to an inclusive and participatory governance for the advancement of women. In fact, I would say with confidence that the political will of the Government of Malaysia to improve the status of women has never wavered since the Declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women.

As a multiracial and multireligious society with a Muslim majority, Malaysia has proven to the world that Islam is not a deterrent to the advancement of women. Indeed, the true teaching of Islam values women as equal to men and has laid the foundation for a society where women and men should work towards a meaningful partnership.

Based on this principle, Malaysia views with grave concern the politicizing of culture and religion for creating power bases. The negative impact of this trend is the denial of the rights of women to education and work, to equal access to and control over resources, to personal security and safety, to independence and to decision-making in the private and public spheres. On this special occasion, Malaysia would like to urge Governments and the international community to monitor and curb the subversive use of culture and religion that denies women their rights.

Malaysia values the contribution of its women to the development of the country. Comprising nearly half of Malaysia's productive workforce, women are a valuable asset to our nation-building. Regardless of race and religion, they have made remarkable progress in almost every sector and level. With better educational facilities and opportunities, women in Malaysia have achieved almost 100 per cent literacy. At work, women have entered into what used to be male preserves and have made significant headway in their chosen fields, including the corporate arena. Many women have managed to break the proverbial glass ceiling. The Government's recognition of women's potential is reflected in their holding positions both in the public and the private sectors. Recently, a woman was appointed Governor of the Central Bank of Malaysia, not to mention many other women who for some time have been appointed as cabinet ministers, including the Minister of International Trade and Industry.

However, these achievements do not mean that our task of promoting the advancement of women has been fully accomplished. In this rapidly changing world, progress is not made by merely taking pride in our present achievements, but by critically examining the situation and constantly assessing our strategies, methods and outcomes and by being prepared to face reality. We believe in a holistic approach to a balanced development that embodies all aspects of social development, which include all citizens, men and women, the poor, the unemployed and disadvantaged groups. Currently, a serious effort is being made to mainstream gender perspectives in all major public policies.

In spite of being a developing nation, we speak with commitment, and we continuously strive for excellence in all our endeavours. In our struggle for the advancement of women in the twenty-first century, we will continue to work harder to change the way women are perceived in society, and, most importantly, the way women perceive themselves. These certainly need a paradigm shift, in terms of both mentality and attitude by women and men alike.

When we met in Beijing in 1995, most of us were still enjoying rapid economic growth. Today the situation has changed. In Iraq, for instance, the economic sanctions imposed by the United Nations have had an adverse impact on the Iraqi population, particularly women and children. On humanitarian grounds, Malaysia urges the United Nations to immediately lift the sanctions. Our hearts also go out to the grieving mothers, wives and daughters in Kuwait on account of the unknown fates of their loved ones since the end of the Gulf war.

In the Asian region, the currency crisis that swept across the region has thrown the economic achievements of Asia into disarray. However, Malaysia is lucky to have a very strong and capable leadership, and we have managed, in our own way, to overcome the problem. This has meant that we have been able to continue with our programmes for the advancement of women. Using multipronged and multidisciplinary strategies, we will continue to improve education and training for women to enable them to meet the labour requirements and challenges of the twenty-first century.

Today, in Malaysia, the "knowledge economy" has become our focus. Our vision in this regard is very clear. We are committed to the orderly development of a knowledge-based society. We cannot but aspire to the highest standards with regard to the skills of our people, their devotion to knowledge and the upgrading of that knowledge, and their self-improvement. To ensure that we can adapt to the challenges of this "knowledge economy", the Government has explicitly stressed that it is necessary to ensure that all Malaysians undergo a paradigm shift: a fundamental move from a production-driven economy to a knowledge based-economy.

This special session provides an excellent opportunity for us all to take stock of the lessons and experiences of the past, and to look forward to new ideas and future directions. On this historic occasion, Malaysia would like to reiterate its commitment to the advancement of women. In formulating our Eighth Malaysia Development Plan, we will ensure that gender issues and gender budgets are fully integrated, and, most importantly, we will ensure that the principle of equality between men and women is incorporated.

Lastly, our Government will continue to strengthen the smart partnership with all women's non-governmental organizations and the private sector. The non-governmental organizations and a number of private organizations in Malaysia are very committed to advancing the status of women, and the Malaysian Government recognizes that their role in supporting and complementing the Government's efforts is of paramount importance. We will continue, *inshallah*, to work harder to strengthen our capacities and capabilities, and together we will move forward to greater heights in achieving the goals of the Beijing Platform of Action.

The Acting President: I give the floor to Her Excellency Mrs. Mirjana Lazarova-Trajkovska, Assistant Minister for Internal Affairs of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Mrs. Lazarova-Trajkovska (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, allow me to express my satisfaction at having the honour and privilege to address this important forum. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate the President and Bureau of the special session on their election and to wish them success in the performance of their responsible duties. I am convinced that their active engagement and participation will contribute greatly to the success of the special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

(*spoke in Macedonian; English text furnished by the delegation*)

It is an undeniable fact that women's rights represent an integral part of human rights. On the basis of this axiom, the international community has for several decades been successfully mustering the political will for the global promotion of the status of women through numerous activities carried out by the United Nations and regional organizations. This process has resulted in the significant development of international legal standards regarding women's rights and their implementation.

The beginning of the new millennium is the right moment to reaffirm the commitments defined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and to recapitulate what has been achieved in the period since the Beijing Conference. In this respect, it is necessary to underscore the historic importance and the impact of the Beijing Conference and Platform for Action. In the last five years, the issue of gender equality and the strengthening of women's rights as basic human rights has been a focus of the political platforms of States, which, through coordinated action with women's movements, have worked on the realistic implementation of gender equality in societies.

However, we are still far from attaining our goal. Five years after Beijing, we need critically to revise the global strategy in order to make this century one of gender equality. In this connection, the Republic of Macedonia has supported, and has actively participated in, the preparatory activities for this special session. I am convinced, therefore, that this forum represents a decisive opportunity to identify the key areas in this sphere, which will define our future commitments to the promotion of gender equality.

The universality of human rights is indisputable. The fundamental principle of non-discrimination has been widely accepted and incorporated in the legal systems of most States. However, a large number of women still face various forms of gender discrimination. Therefore, one of the most efficient ways of eliminating gender discrimination — the importance of doing which was underscored at the Vienna Conference and endorsed at Beijing — is establishing an international mechanism for filing individual petitions regarding violations of obligations undertaken following accession to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The adoption of the Optional Protocol to this Convention is a big step forward, and its entry into force will for the first time enable an international body to review individual petitions regarding gender discrimination. The Republic of Macedonia has signed this Protocol and is committed to its ratification. It is important that the implementation of this significant instrument soon becomes a reality.

The problems that women face in promoting their status in society are numerous and complex. Undoubtedly, the most appalling of these is the traffic in women and children. Trafficking in their bodies and lives, as well as the various forms of child sexual abuse is the greatest hypocrisy of humanity. It directly destroys human dignity and personal integrity and represents a violation of the most basic human rights, while at the same time being a complex problem related to poverty and organized crime. Therefore, the fight against this evil is difficult and often fails. This fight needs to be uncompromising.

The Republic of Macedonia strongly supports the efforts and measures of the international community in this respect. We especially support the work of the Ad Hoc Committee preparing the two protocols to the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. The two protocols will contribute to the prevention of trafficking in human beings and thus to securing direct protection of women and children. The Republic of Macedonia hopes that these two very important instruments will soon be finalized.

In this context, the Republic of Macedonia welcomes the adoption of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child which punishes child trafficking, child prostitution and child pornography. I will soon sign this protocol.

In addition to the global strategy for the elimination of gender discrimination, a comprehensive national strategy and programme of action must be designed. That strategy must adjust global aims to local needs, and its implementation will ultimately produce the desired results. On the basis of needs at the national level, the Republic of Macedonia is devoting due attention to the gender perspective. In this regard, and in accordance with the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government adopted the national action plan. It is a comprehensive development document which identifies problems and formulates priority activities and strategic measures for the promotion of the status of women in the Republic of Macedonia.

Considering that gender equality has been established at the legislative level for quite some time, one of the basic priorities of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia is to promote the implementation of this fundamental principle. A crucial point is the participation of women in decision-making processes, particularly with regard to political decision-making. Given that a large number of women in the Republic of Macedonia are highly educated and represent half of the intellectual and labour potential of the State, there are preconditions for improving this situation. In order to achieve better results, the national action plan envisages the establishment of a governmental body to deal with gender-related issues.

In 1998, with the aim of increasing the number of women in politics, the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia adopted a declaration on equal gender participation in the decision-making processes. While the declaration produced certain effects on the most recent parliamentary elections, the number of women in Parliament and Government is still insufficient and cannot have a determining impact on decision-making.

Unfavourable representation of women in political decision-making is a feature of the entire region of south-eastern Europe. This is the primary reason for deciding the basic motto of the Stability Pact working group on gender equality: Greater empowerment of women in south-eastern Europe. The Republic of Macedonia participates in the projects and activities of this working group. One of the proposed initiatives is the establishment of a women's lobby to fight prejudice regarding traditional gender roles, to encourage women to political engagement and to lobby the public and political parties for inclusion of more women in the electoral candidates lists. The women's lobby in the Republic of Macedonia was established in March 2000 and is very active. We hope that the results of its activities will be visible, even as early as the local elections to be held in autumn.

The Republic of Macedonia is very active in intergovernmental cooperation with the Council of Europe. In this respect, it is a great honour for us to have been entrusted with organizing, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, the European ministerial conference on gender equality in Skopje in 2002.

In conclusion, allow me once again to express my conviction that the results of this forum will represent a turning point in the global strategy for the promotion of the status of women in all societies.

The President: I now call on Ms. Susan Mubarak, President of the National Council for Women and Chairperson of the delegation of Egypt.

Ms. Mubarak (Egypt): On behalf of the Egyptian delegation, I welcome this opportunity to be among so

many partners of diverse experience, cultures and history who are here to reaffirm our commitment to Beijing and our determination to accelerate the advancement of women. Let me just emphasize that we are not here to reopen the debate or go back on the collective agreements and decisions adopted at Beijing and Cairo. Rather, we are here to move forward and pave the way for the empowerment of women.

As partners working together on both the national and international levels, we know that we can make a difference to ensure gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century. Partnerships are the most effective channel for broad-based consensus on both economic and social priorities, but effective partnerships are difficult to forge. This is particularly true during periods of rapid change. In an increasingly globalized world, it is those countries that are most responsive to change that are best able to meet the development challenges of the twenty-first century. However, there is a cost in unregulated change. The pace of change must match the economic, social and political realities of each country. At the national level, any change must be supported by economic growth that creates livelihood opportunity, since growth without equity is a prescription for social strife.

We are also aware that there are fundamental inequities of power among different social groups in society. Interest groups and power elites often act as gatekeepers to Government-provided services or are characterized by views that may conflict with sound development policies. Additionally, attitudinal barriers can act as key obstacles faced by nations as they attempt to integrate change and innovation into their traditional societies. We must therefore strive to modify attitudes and mindsets without undermining the social fabric and cohesiveness of our nations.

The President returned to the Chair.

Moreover the demands made by international development partners, whose agendas and prescriptions often draw attention to the obstacles faced by our developing countries, often fail to show the necessary will and commitment to reduce the cost and risk that comes with rapid change. All parties at the global level should be willing to redress the balance of power in favour of the weaker members of the community of nations, while working towards the enhancement of social progress and the more equitable distribution of resources between North and South.

We all agree that the advancement of women is essential for true democracy, balanced decision-making and effective management of social and economic resources. But how many countries can truly achieve our stated aims without the donor community providing sufficient official development assistance resources to meet the 0.7 per cent and the 20/20 targets.

In Egypt, the National Council for Women has adopted the notion of partnership among the Government, non-governmental organizations and local communities. Our experience shows that the most successful women's programmes are those that work directly with the grass roots, reach large numbers, have well defined criteria for eligibility and monitoring, and provide tangible incentives to the target beneficiaries.

For 25 years now, women's issues have been on the global agenda. Indeed, this has made a major contribution to identifying problems and proposing solutions. However, we must caution that our task is still far from accomplished. We need to rally all our forces to move forward. The Secretary-General, in his eloquent remarks yesterday, vividly portrayed for us the complex problems facing women worldwide in their societies. This situation has been aggravated by the socio-economic conditions of many countries.

It is in that context that I would like to propose an initiative similar to the Global Environment Facility, such as a trust fund for women or a global facility for women. Such a facility would act as an umbrella for existing institutions, programmes and funds charged with the formulation of strategies. It would also consolidate efforts that are now fragmented and would increase resources for meeting priority areas of universal concern identified in Beijing and beyond.

Finally, I need hardly stress that the role of the United Nations family of organizations is as important in the development sphere as it is in the political and security spheres. There can be no lasting stability without progress on the development front. We therefore hope that the international donor community, together with the United Nations system, will match their partnership rhetoric with concrete action for better coordination, better-targeted support and a larger flow of aid resources.

We trust that at this special session members will agree on action-oriented recommendations to be submitted to the Millennium Summit next September so that the gender file can find its rightful place on the

United Nations agenda for the twenty-first century. I wish the debate a successful outcome.

The President: I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Win Mra, Chairman of the delegation of Myanmar.

Mr. Mra (Myanmar): My delegation is very happy to see you, Sir, presiding over this special session on promoting a cause that is dear to all of us: "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". I would like to assure you of the full cooperation of my delegation as we work for a fruitful outcome of this very important special session of the General Assembly.

This special session has provided us with a welcome opportunity to review and appraise the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, and to adopt a new strategy containing further actions and initiatives to accelerate the implementation of the Platform. In Beijing, the delegation of Myanmar apprised the international community of the status of Myanmar women, who enjoy unique equality with men as their inherent right. My delegation would now like to inform the Assembly of what the Government of Myanmar has undertaken since Beijing in order to achieve gender equality, development and peace.

Ms. Yai (Côte d'Ivoire), Vice-President, took the Chair.

But first, let me refresh our collective memory by recalling once again that in Myanmar all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of race, religion, status or sex. Women also enjoy equal political, economic, social and cultural rights. Since Beijing, we have systematically instituted a national machinery and programmes for the promotion of the advancement of women. On 3 July 1996, the Myanmar national committee was established to carry out activities for the advancement of women, and that day was designated as Myanmar Women's Day. Working committees were also formed at the national, state-division, district and township levels.

As a follow-up action to the Beijing Conference, Myanmar became a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in July 1997, and its initial report has been submitted.

In August 1997, the National Committee for Women's Affairs adopted the Myanmar national action plan for the advancement of women. Six areas — education, health, economy, culture, the girl child and violence against women — have been identified as critical areas that are considered to be most relevant for the advancement of the women of Myanmar. Recently, two new critical areas, environment and the media, have been added, and subcommittees have been formed in each of those areas. Here, my delegation would like to highlight the area of violence against women. In Myanmar, violence against women and girl children does not pose a major problem. However, we take this issue very seriously. The sub-committees on violence against women and girl children have been active in protecting women and girl children against violence. Suppression of the exploitation of those vulnerable groups is given special attention by the Government, as well as by various organizations. The Government has also strengthened legislation in those areas. Counselling centres for the victims of violence have been established throughout the country, and individuals can file complaints directly with the committee. In April 1998, a law amending the suppression of prostitution act of 1949 was enacted to further strengthen the existing law. Under existing laws, heavy penalties, including life sentences in jail, may be imposed for sexual abuse and rape.

Although eight areas have been identified, the remaining areas of women and poverty, women's human rights and women at the decision-making level are given due attention, since the areas of concern of the Platform for Action are interrelated and interdependent. The policies and programmes of the Government became more effective with the participation of the National Committee. Plans have also been made to collect gender-related data in these areas.

The National Committee enhances the cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations in implementing the National Plan of Action. A non-governmental organization, the Myanmar Maternal and Child Welfare Association, which has branches and associations all over the country at the grass-roots level, is dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of mothers and children. Similarly, the Myanmar Women Entrepreneurs Association has been active in enhancing the role of Myanmar women in business. Some of the

successful activities of the association include transfer of technology and income-generating programmes for rural women, as well as credit and loan schemes for women.

Religion and culture in Myanmar influence the behaviour of men and women alike. Even in the age of globalization — perhaps even because of it — it is important to give due regard to the role that culture can play in promoting women's rights. Here, I wish to emphasize the important influence of Myanmar culture not only in promoting positive impulses but also in inhibiting excesses. Because of strong cultural and religious influences, there is little or no discrimination against women and the girl child, and cases of violence against them are rare. Therefore, in promoting women's rights, my delegation strongly believes that cultural diversity must be taken into consideration.

My delegation wishes to take this opportunity to highlight the fact that the promotion of women's rights needs a conducive environment of peace and development. In conflict situations and in situations of abject poverty, it is the vulnerable groups, including women and the girl child, who suffer most and who suffer foremost. This fact has been vividly apparent in the various conflicts that we are witnessing today. In Myanmar, the Government has been taking concerted measures to bring national unity to a country that was plagued by insurgency for over 40 years. My delegation is happy to say that for the first time in recent history, we have been able to put a stop to the internecine fighting among our national brethren and bring peace and stability to our country. As a result, we are now able to exploit our resources and concentrate our energies on economic development. It is in this environment of peace, stability and economic growth that we intend to promote the cause of women and the girl child in Myanmar. It is a worthy cause. It is a precious cause. It is a cause that is dear to the hearts of the people of Myanmar, both women and men.

In conclusion, may I assure the Assembly that Myanmar will redouble its efforts in promoting the rights of women and the girl child in an environment of peace, stability and development.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Abulhasan, Chairman of the delegation of Kuwait.

Mr. Abulhasan (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): I should like at the outset to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at this special session. I can assure him that my delegation is fully ready to cooperate with him so as to bring the work of this session to a successful conclusion and enable it to achieve its objectives, as expected by the international community, with a view to enhancing the advancement of women and overcoming the obstacles impeding their advancement.

My delegation has examined the report of the Secretary-General on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. In this regard, we listened to the important statement made yesterday by the Secretary-General, who gave an account of developments and trends and referred to various measures and actions being taken. We endorse his comments, which are aimed at achieving the advancement and promotion of women so that they can fully realize their political rights and play their role in the economic and social fields.

We welcome the ideas contained in the report under consideration, and we should like to stress two points. First, my delegation concurs with the goals indicated in the report of the Secretary-General relating to combating poverty by creating a favourable and inclusive economic and political environment. It supports the further political and economical empowerment of women by strengthening their participation in the decision-making process, by identifying concrete international, regional and national objectives as a means of eradicating poverty among them, and by establishing a monitoring mechanism to this end.

My delegation supports the proposal to make special efforts during the Millennium Assembly, to be held in September this year, with a view to developing a world strategy for the eradication of poverty that would give due regard to gender issues. Kuwait encourages the participation of women on an equal footing with men in the elaboration of economic and social policies, especially in the development of programmes relating to economic stability and of polices and legislation relating to health care, childcare and the role of women in processes of privatization taking place in the public sector.

Secondly, my delegation agrees with the Secretary-General that it is not possible to implement the strategic goals contained in the Beijing Platform for Action relating to armed conflict except by

implementing the existing legal criteria enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the principles of international humanitarian law. Following the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, Kuwait set up a national standing committee to implement the Platform for Action. The committee members include representatives of the various ministries and of civil society. This committee was entrusted with the elaboration of a Kuwaiti strategy and plan of action for the implementation of the Beijing Declaration.

We established a women's section within the Department for Women and Children's Affairs, in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour in May 1997. Its first task is to elaborate an integrated plan for the promotion of Kuwaiti women based on the values of our society and the teachings of our righteous Islamic religion. The second task is to elaborate and follow up a programme for women's activities with a view to enabling them to carry out their cultural and social functions. Its third task is to follow up the implementation of international Arab conventions and treaties relating to women and families. The fourth task is to contribute to the development of activities, programmes and policies for training Kuwaiti women. The fifth task is to raise women's awareness and to ensure they are fully conscious of their rights and duties relating to the family and society.

Women in Kuwait enjoy full legal personhood from birth, and the State of Kuwait recognizes the rights corresponding to that personhood. The law entitles women to defend those rights and preserve them. It would be no exaggeration for us to say Islam guarantees women's rights and dignity to a greater extent than other religions. Kuwaiti law entitles women to defend and preserve those rights, and it penalizes any abuse of women. This is stipulated in article 29 of the Constitution, which states that all persons are equal in human dignity, before the law, in public duties and in rights, regardless of gender, race, religion or language.

Kuwait signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 17 January 1994. Article 44 of the Kuwaiti Constitution guarantees every citizen's right to work and to choose his or her type of work, not to mention the women's right to carry out professional and commercial activities.

Women constitute 33.5 per cent of the total national workforce, across various sectors. This is a reflection of Kuwaiti women's awareness of the importance and necessity of effective participation in the process of social and economic development, which has led them to fill the highest posts in the State. Kuwaiti women participate in many social and media activities through women's societies that guide and organize their activities. Those societies enjoy the full support of the Government, which provides them with the necessary financial and moral support. This leads to the further advancement of Kuwaiti women and provides them with the opportunity to participate effectively, fully and freely in the building of modern Kuwaiti society.

Despite efforts made by the Government to strengthen the role of women in the life of society and in overcoming the obstacles that impede this process, Kuwaiti women still suffer from social and psychological problems because of the loss of a parent, brother, sister or husband. It is an open secret that Iraqi prisons still hold Kuwaiti citizens and nationals of third parties. This suffering is deepened because of the Iraqi procrastination, as for nine years now Iraq has not freed the Kuwaiti prisoners-of-war or made information about their fate public. This is crystal-clear from the Iraqi Government's boycott of the meetings of the international Tripartite Commission responsible for captives and prisoners-of-war from Kuwait and countries.

The issue of prisoners-of-war and captives is a purely humanitarian issue that must not be politicized or used as a tool for blackmail. This is in no one's interests. Our clear commitment to the Platform for Action and to respect for the cultural, historical and religious specificities of peoples is a main factor in the promotion of women and in activating their principal role in the construction of society in a full partnership with men, based on equality in rights and duties. Kuwait has always ensured that the process of development in all sectors is a strategic objective and that the development of women, the strengthening of their capabilities and the preservation of their dignity is a matter of conviction stemming from our commitment to the tolerant principles of the Islamic shariah, which granted women their full rights long before current international law and legislation did so.

The President (spoke in French): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Lamuel Stanislaus, Chairman of the delegation of Grenada.

Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada): At the outset, my delegation congratulates Ms. Angela King, Assistant Secretary-General and Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, the Commission on the Status of Women and all responsible for the preparation of this twenty-third special session. A global gathering of this composition, size and quality, representing the best in womanhood, provides an opportunity for "Women 2000" to reaffirm women's claim to gender equality in social, political and economic life, especially in the workplace.

Let me suggest here that men of quality should never feel threatened by women for equality, as together we seek to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, while reducing to a minimum the unnecessary, repetitive, obfuscating rhetoric and the political and diplomatic legerdemain, which ought not to dominate this special session. Actions speak louder than words.

Only a few days ago, 31 May, a United Nations publication entitled Progress of the *World's Women 2000* was made public. It shows progress as well as persistent disparities between women and men worldwide, according to United Nations Under-Secretary-General Nitin Desai. The 6 subject areas analysed, out of the 12 contained in the Beijing Platform for Action are health, human rights, political decision-making, work, education and community, population and families.

Due to time constraints, my delegation will touch only briefly on three subject areas: human rights, political decision-making and work.

The Secretary-General put it best when he referred to women's rights as human rights. This is amply borne out in his substantive and far-reaching Millennium Summit report, the outcome of which is eagerly awaited with high expectation.

Similarly, Jane Fonda was right on target when she said that you cannot alleviate poverty, and you cannot create sustainable development, if you do not improve the lives of women.

The underlying theme of this special session, the first of the twenty-first century, is gender equality, which is a human rights issue nationally and internationally. The preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights reaffirms the Charter of the United Nations with respect to the equal rights of men and women and article 23 of the Universal Declaration emphasizes that "everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work."

It is socially wrong and morally unjust that, in the twenty-first century, so much time has to be spent discussing and debating how to implement a basic and fundamental human right, which is rooted in the divine admonition to do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the architects of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in elucidating the gender equality provision, made the observation that no one can make you feel inferior without your consent.

Much lip-service is given to this universal document, which is regarded by some as a flag to sail under rather than as a rudder to be guided by. Just as a song is not a song until you sing it and a bell is not a bell until you ring it, just so the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is meaningless until you practise it. Is it not incongruous that, more than 50 years after the ratification of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the political landscape is still dominated by men, yet all international instruments and all national legislatures enshrine the principle of equality between men and women?

Grenada has initiated a gender perspective in its policies and programmes with respect to gender equality, not only in Government, but in all walks of life. The latest data in United Nations publications show that only nine women are heads of State or Government and that only eight per cent of the world's cabinet ministers are women as of the early part of this century. Sweden is the only country with a majority of women ministers at 55 per cent. My delegation is somewhat pleased, however, to report that, in Grenada, 27 per cent of ministers and members of the Cabinet are women. Worldwide, more progress has been made in the appointment of women to sub-ministerial positions, particularly in the Caribbean and in the developed regions outside Europe, where women account for about 20 per cent. In my country, that figure is 40 per cent.

Women in the year 2000 deserve better representation. They must work together, and work with men of goodwill, to loosen the patriarchal or male

dominance in society, which is so much the poorer without their input. What a waste of talent!

The physical and sexual abuse of women and girls worldwide by men, such as honour killings, beatings, rape, prostitution, abortion and other forms of violation, some not even reported, cry to high Heaven for redress.

In the world of work, women have made some gains and, with some exceptions, comprise one third of the world's labour force by virtue of self-employment, part-time and home-based work. Yet gender imbalance is nowhere more noticeable and keenly felt than in the work place, where, on average, women earn at least 30 per cent less than men for equal work. In the highest echelon in the corporate world, women do not hold positions comparable to their male counterparts.

It is true to say also that women's domestic roles as wives and mothers, which are so vital to the well-being of society, are underpaid and undervalued. Unpaid domestic work everywhere is seen as the woman's responsibility and part of the woman's condition. No wonder two thirds of the world's poor and illiterate are women, giving rise to the new term "feminization of poverty".

In this connection, let me refer to the Lima consensus, which came out of the eighth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean in Peru. The consensus states that economic globalization, trade liberalization, structural adjustment programmes, external debt and the resulting migration patterns are factors which, among others, can have specific and negative impacts on the lives and situation of women, particularly those of the least economically developed regions, and can cause the dislocation of families, communities and nations.

For the women of the year 2000, I want to recall from Greek mythology the resourcefulness, the common sense and the power of the women of the year 411 BC, during the silly and unnecessary Peloponnesian war between the city-states of Athens and Sparta. The women ended the military madness and exposed the absurdity and futility of war, first by seizing the Acropolis, which contained the treasury, and then by refusing to have intimacies with their returning men and soldiers. Taken together, these actions of seizure and sex-strike on the part of the women of 411 BC, according to the *Lysistrata* of Aristophanes, which is a masterpiece of comedy, brought peace and development in a century very, very far removed from the twenty-first.

Finally, the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen wrote more than 100 years ago that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. It is the hope of my delegation that the outcome of this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly will demonstrate once and for all that the time has come for Women 2000 and men of quality to make common cause through global and fraternal cooperation in order to secure the rights of women in their entirety, according to conscience, natural law and human rights.

Working and praying together, we are confident that, in leaving here, we will be granted the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Peter Dickson Donigi, Chairman of the delegation of Papua New Guinea.

Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea): I am quite conscious of the time and will simply outline the historical background of Papua New Guinea's society, look at the constitutional directives of governance as its affects women and human rights, and end by calling for action by our development partners.

I also join others before me in congratulating the President of the General Assembly and his Bureau on their election to their important posts on the occasion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century".

It is with profound pleasure that I stand here before this body to declare my Government's and my personal support for gender equality and the creation of opportunities for women. I say it is a personal commitment because it appears that, in my household, I am very much a minority. There is a six-to-one ratio, definitely slanted against me in every respect. For clarity, my wife and I have five daughters. But I enjoy every moment of the trials and tribulations facing my immediate family and I could not ask for better.

In Papua New Guinea society, a Melanesian chief is expected to set an example in upholding and enforcing customary laws among clan members. Some customary laws may seem to the Western eye very archaic and to need replacement by Western values and standards. Others may be justifiable on the grounds that they have served our people for over 40,000 years and so why should we change because some outsider has told us to do so?

Our ancestors were the first people to settle the Pacific Islands, apart from the Australian Aboriginal people. The Islands were settled over a 40,000-year period. The last great migration was by people of European descent, as recently as the last century, to Australia and New Zealand, French Polynesia and New Caledonia. Each wave of immigrants into the Pacific introduced new ideas, methods of work and styles of living. The Pacific way of life and, for that matter, Papua New Guinea have been very much influenced by new waves of people and ideas over time, and so this trend will continue.

There is, however, one difference. The change over the last 40,000 years was gradual, but the one that has taken place over the last 10 to 20 years has been drastic — the result of new and faster ways of communication. The space age has transformed a society which was in the Stone Age 75 years ago and propelled it into a fast-moving age of computer and space technology. Papua New Guineans are exposed to over 20 television channels from around the world. Papua New Guineans, who 75 years ago were using stone tools, are now using modern tools and accept technological changes more readily than was previously thought possible.

Papua New Guineans are now able to learn foreign languages, increase their computer literacy and operate space-age technological machinery. The pace of change in my country is therefore far faster, in the space of one or two generations, than in the previous 40,000 years.

We are, however, able to report that what is contained in the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action for women was already foreseen by Papua New Guinean politicians when they drafted and adopted the Constitution of Papua New Guinea in 1975, some 20 years before the Beijing Platform.

For instance, the Constitution of Papua New Guinea contains what is generally called the National Goals and Directive Principles. These are guiding principles of governance. While they are not enforceable per se in a court of law, it is a requirement that all constitutional laws affecting the rights of the individual must have a reference point in these Goals and Principles. The second National Goal provides for the equality of all citizens and directs that opportunities must be created for all citizens to participate actively in the political, social and educational advancement and economic activities in the country. The Constitution, in furtherance of these National Goals and Directive Principles, created a number of constitutional rights which are absolute, and a number of others which are not absolute but can be regulated by a law that complies with certain preconditions.

Absolute rights include the right to life. There is, however, one qualifier. It is permissible to officially take someone's life in the implementation of a law that imposes penalties for criminal conduct. Accordingly, the question of the right to life is sacrosanct under our Constitution. Abortion, then, is a crime under our criminal law system.

Other constitutional rights include the right to hold public office, the right to equal opportunities for employment, the right to join unions and other non-governmental organizations, freedom of religion, freedom of speech and publication of information, and so on.

The Constitution also recognizes that the Papua New Guinea society is based on the family unit, and that it is the family unit that must be strengthened. The proper implementation of this Directive Principle in our Constitution will mean that the exercise of individual rights must be for the benefit and the strengthening of the family unit. This prime objective runs counter to the western philosophy of individual rights. We will continue to back every scheme and policy which supports the family unit as the basis of the Papua New Guinea society and nation. The primacy of individual rights breaks down the family unit, creates social discord and disharmony and leads to the breakdown of State services.

Thus it can be said that Papua New Guineans enjoy many constitutional rights that are not available in some of our Member States. The Government has adopted many strategies and revised them on many occasions in an effort to implement the National Goals and Directive Principles.

These policies look good on paper. So what then is the problem with Papua New Guinea? It has a low level of education for women and girl children, a high mortality rate, a high incidence of crimes against women, an increasing incidence of women with confirmed HIV/AIDS, and a pitiful participation of women in politics, in senior Government positions and in the business sector. Yes, we have seen those United Nations reports in respect to Papua New Guinea. They do look pitiful for a country with so much in the way of mineral resources.

However, Papua New Guinea has made some progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the areas of education, health, agriculture, environment and other social sectors, with assistance from our regional and international partners. More needs to be done in this particular area.

The problem is simply this. We as a developing country need development partners which are prepared to walk with us instead of dictating to us. We need to develop strategic long-term plans to change the ingrained social structure that has been developed over 40,000 years and substitute it with one that is generally acceptable to the community as a whole, taking into account the changing circumstances of our country. While it is true that the Constitution also recognizes and gives effect to our customary laws as they existed before we became an independent nation, it is also true to say that customary law is not static — it is a living law. It changes over time due to outside influences. Once the resilience of the Papua New Guinea society has been recognized, it may then be possible to develop a plan of action which will over time have an influence on and change customary norms. What is the most likely catalyst for change? The answer is very simple: education.

The Government of Papua New Guinea therefore gives high priority to education. However, every year 50,000 children at the primary-education level in Papua New Guinea cannot find places at high schools and become what we call school dropouts. They are not dropouts by choice. In fact, a high percentage of them have above-average school aptitudes. The problem is lack of schools and teachers. The problem is not one of gender. It is a general problem that affects every Papua New Guinean child who aspires to a higher and appropriate education.

Papua New Guineans do not need to reinvent the wheel. We came from the Stone Age. We did not have to use a horse-drawn cart; we adapted and went straight into the age of computer science and technology, and we will continue to make great strides if only we are given the appropriate opportunity and assistance.

I therefore have only one plea to our development partners: invest in Papua New Guinea's educational system. Education is a tool for the emancipation of women all over the world. Education is a tool for changing the behavioural patterns and attitudes of men and boy children towards women and girl children. Education will ensure women's health-care needs, including the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases. Education reduces the illiteracy rate. Education will lead to shared-decision making. Education leads to economic empowerment and opens up employment opportunities. Education strengthens human rights. In short, education teaches respect for human dignity, motherhood and family. Education must be a development tool.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.